

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

Wolverine Coil Spring Co.

Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center

Wolverine Coil Spring Leaps For Success

Client Profile:

Wolverine Coil Spring is a family owned manufacturer of springs, stampings, clips, wire forms, and assemblies that has been operating in the Grand Rapids, Michigan area for 57 years. The company serves the automotive, furniture, hardware, construction, and appliance industries. Wolverine Coil Spring employs less than 100 people.

Situation:

Since 1995, Wolverine Coil Spring (Wolverine) has participated in many of the workforce development initiatives offered by the Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center (MMTC), a NIST MEP network affiliate. The organization's western Michigan office, housed with the Right Place Program (RPP), has long supplied Wolverine with all its training needs. RPP has also helped Wolverine secure state training grant funding. When the company decided it was time to address several outstanding production issues, it again contacted MMTC for assistance.

Solution:

MMTC had Wolverine participate in several User Groups, which provide an opportunity for inter-firm learning. Companies frequently learn as much from one another as from the facilitator. The Lean Network Learning Group and Family Owned Business User Group both look at complex issues in an interactive forum.

With the help of the Lean Network Learning Group, Wolverine developed the Focused Action Solutions Team (FAST) approach. FAST teams conduct five-day kaizen events that concentrate on resolving a specific production problem. Wolverine's FAST teams reduced raw-material inventory by 80 percent, and have developed a more efficient packaging and auditing system that allows shipping employees to pull finished products directly from the work cell and load them onto a truck for delivery. Set-up time reductions have cut wait times almost in half, from 8 hours to as little as four hours, depending on the part. The teams also added visual controls to help identify workflow.

The Family Owned Business User Group developed curriculum to address issues specifically affecting family owned businesses. Each company worked to develop a vision statement, a communication structure with mechanisms for conflict resolution, policies for dealing with family members, and a succession plan. This User Group also developed a "buddy system" for new employees, a program

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

that welcomes new employees and gives them enough information to get started. Now, when employees start their first days at Wolverine, they are assigned a "buddy" who serves as their guide, introducing them to other employees, explaining the internal company structure, and even taking them to lunch. Each new employee meets briefly with the company's president to learn about Wolverine's extensive history and gain perspective on the work and commitment to quality.

Results:

Reduced raw material inventory by 80 percent.

Developed a more efficient packaging and auditing system.

Reduced wait times resulting from equipment set-ups by as much as 50 percent.

Implemented visual controls at every work station.

Developed a "buddy system" for new employee orientation.

Testimonial:

"One of the key things about the User Group programs was the ability to pick up the phone and have instant access [to] other business owners' knowledge and experience. The Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center is truly a one-stop resource for smaller manufacturers, allowing us to link with other companies."

Jay Dunwell, President